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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000989

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: MEDIA REACTION TO CODEL HAGEL

1. SUMMARY: On June 3, Senator Hagel led a delegation to Armenia which met with President Robert Kocharian and Minister of Defense Serzh Sargsyan, and which reviewed Armenia's peacekeeping battalion. Following these meetings, Senator Hagel held a press conference with more than 20 media outlets. Media coverage was moderate, slightly less than expected. Coverage focused on the Senator's remarks regarding the transfer of Russian military equipment from Georgia to Armenia and on Senator Hagel's remarks regarding the Armenian tragedy of 1915. END SUMMARY

THE TRANSFER OF RUSSIAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO ARMENIA FROM  
GEORGIA IS NEGATIVE FOR ARMENIA

2. In a lengthy article on Senator Hagel's press conference, the radical oppositionist daily HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK reported on 6/3/05 that Senator Hagel views the transfer of Russian military equipment from Georgia to Armenia as negative for Armenia. According to the daily, "The Senator mentioned that the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia is good news...for Georgia. By analogy, this good news for Georgia is bad news for Armenia because some of the bases are being relocated to Armenia."

3. INTERFAX NEWS AGENCY on 6/3/05 took Senator Hagel's comments on Russian military bases a step further, stating, "U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel said the possible transfer of weapons from Russian military bases in Georgia to bases in Armenia would endanger the regional balance of power in view of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict." (From the transcript: Senator Hagel in fact stated, "This is an issue between the two governments of Russia and Armenia...I think it has always been the policy of the United States...that the military presence of other nations in sovereign nations is not helpful in regions of the world where we are trying to bring peace and prosperity and settle very serious conflicts like Nagorno Karabakh.")

4. ARMENIA LIBERTY also focused on the issue of Russian military bases. According to a 6/3/05 article, Senator Hagel "signaled U.S. unease over Russian military presence in the country as he visited Yerevan at the head of a U.S. government delegation comprising senior military officials."

"GENOCIDE" SHOULD BE LEFT TO HISTORIANS

5. AZG, a center-right daily, reported on 6/3/05 that Senator Hagel urged Armenia not to focus on the tragedy of 1915. According to the newspaper, "The issue of the Armenian genocide is not of great interest to the Senator; he is mainly focused on current issues."

6. HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK stated that Senator Hagel's "'Haylur' style changed with his ideas expressed on genocide. In particular, when answering a question on genocide, Senator Hagel stated that the issue should be openly discussed by historians." (NOTE: "Haylur" is a news program on state television on which Armenian government officials regularly express the GOAM view on issues. Haykakan Zhamanak implied that Senator Hagel expressed a different view than that of the Administration. END NOTE.)

EVANS